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SIPDIS

EUR (FOOKS), INL (CARROLL), EUR/ACE (KEETON); DOJ FOR OPDAT
(ALEXANDRE)

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - CANTONAL COURT CONVICTS NOTORIOUS MAFIA
BOSS, SEVEN ASSOCIATES

¶1. (U) The Sarajevo Cantonal Court's June 23 decision to convict notorious mafia boss Muhammed Ali Gasi continues to elicit favorable commentary. Gasi, along with his brother, and six associates, were convicted on organized crime-related charges, including extortion, illegal property purchases, and illegal construction. The men received a collective prison sentence of 42.5 years, with Gasi receiving a twenty year sentence while his brother and other co-defendants received sentences ranging from 1 year to 6.5 years. Notably, this was the first time that a cantonal court forfeited property in a case. Moreover, both the judge and the prosecutor in the case had participated in OPDAT-sponsored activities, including a seminar on asset forfeiture.

¶2. (U) The highly-anticipated verdict received significant press coverage for days. Many media outlets portrayed the court decision as a win for the rule of law in Bosnia. A Federation Television (FTV) journalist who commented on the case over the weekend, sums up reactions best by noting that as a result of the verdict, the week of June 22 was a week in which "the rule of law appeared" and in which "murderers, pimps, racketeers, and brutes" are no longer considered "street heroes."

¶3. (U) Comment: Though we can not predict what will happen in the appeals process, the Gasi case is a much-needed high-profile example of the judiciary making good on its mandate to deliver justice. Gasi is a particularly notorious criminal who inspired fear in the hearts of many. The verdict in his case helps boost public confidence in the judiciary and beat back criticism from politicians -- temporarily. The judiciary will need to follow up with a string of other high-profile wins soon if it hopes to effect a sea change in public opinion and to garner broad political support for its work

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